

DAVID BURKE

The Familiar Yet Eclectic Menu at His Upper East Side Eatery

If there were ever a chef that truly exemplified classic New York fare with a playful and global twist, it's David Burke. And nowhere is this more apparent than at his latest restaurant Tavern62. Let us elaborate: first, it's set in an old two-story townhouse on the Upper East Side. Downstairs is the bar, the width of the room, anchored by the vintage Bugatti race model mounted on the wall above it. Then there's the food being served in the upstairs dining room. There's oysters and bacon to start, a Prime Porterhouse for Two, Roasted Duck Breast – that's the New York side. While on the same menu he has Angry Lobster Dumplings, Octopus-Chorizo Kebabs with a chili-laced glaze, and a Pork & Shrimp Fried Rice – there's the playful and global.

As for the chef himself, if he seems familiar with understanding the nuances of the New York City diner, it's because he's not new around here. After a string of successful Manhattan eateries, he partnered with ESquared Hospitality, and Tavern62 by David Burke is the first result of the new venture. When an opportunity to chat with the chef came up, we jumped on it. We had a chance to discuss the eclectic menu with great detail, and here's what he had to say:



Tavern62 is one of your newest restaurants. What were you most influenced by when creating this menu?

I wanted a restaurant that could offer high-end cooking with a very comfortable and timeless style of décor. Our menu offers guests familiar dishes with my own unique twists added to them that guests crave and that they can enjoy in a relaxed atmosphere. We want everyone to feel at home.

There's one appetizer we must bring up right away: the "Clothesline" Candied Bacon. Give us the rundown. How'd you develop everything from the taste to the presentation?

I've been making the "Clothesline" Candied Bacon for nine years and the idea for this dish originated when I started participating in charity walkaround tasting events serving hundreds of people. I once served Peking Duck hanging from a clothesline! That eventually led to me to develop the "Clothesline" Candied Bacon and serving it at Tavern62, where it makes for a great shareable appetizer that our guests love.

Also, hanging the bacon from a clothesline helps render out the excess fat when we blowtorch it tableside. We also serve the bacon with a lemon and pickle to cut that richness. The bacon itself is coated in maple syrup and black pepper to tantalize the palate with both sweet and heat.

Moving down the list, some of the mains, like the Peking Pork Shank and Ginger & Pepper-Crusted Salmon, seem to be Asian-inspired. Where's that connection coming from?

I originally began serving Pork Shank as a German-inspired dish with sauerkraut and mustard. In 1996 that version of the Pork Shank won *USA Today's* Dish of the Year. But when it came to serving pork shank at Tavern62, I wanted something that would really appeal to the Upper East Side neighborhood. And people love Peking Duck up here, so I thought it would be cool to do a take on that with Pork Shank and fried rice.

For the salmon, the ginger paste that coats the filet really wakes up the palate without overpowering the fish. It's bright and refreshing – not as strong as wasabi but it gives your taste buds a nice, fresh surprise when you bite into the salmon. We tame the ginger so the flavor is more

balanced and mild by boiling the root five times in five sets of water before creating the ginger paste.

What's been the dish that's surprised you the most by its reaction from diners?

The Bison Short Rib that debuted on the fall menu. We serve it with barbecue prawns and polenta. I'm surprised at how many people are ordering it – it's a nice surprise. I'm also pleasantly surprised that our new bar menu is going over so well with diners and how many people have been packing in the bar area on the first level of the restaurant to enjoy the drinks and bar snacks. It fills the restaurant with a wonderful energy.

Let's talk about the bar for a moment. What is your favorite cocktail and which dish do you like to pair with it?

The Blue Bugatti with vodka, blueberries, lime and ginger beer is our signature cocktail and a big seller. It's named for the vintage Bugatti race model hanging over the bar. Pisco-based drinks have been popular too, and those go great with our seafood dishes, especially anything with citrus.

Let's wrap things up on a sweet note by finishing with dessert. Which do you think is the most unique confection, one that we're likely to only find here?

Cheesecake Lollipops are my signature – I've been making those for a long time. A newer signature at Tavern62 is the Chocolate Waffle Lava Cake. We also always look to have a pie on the menu and those change based on the seasons. Most recently we've been serving a Chocolate Cream Pie.

Since its November, the month of giving thanks, leave us with this: what are you most thankful for from your experience so far at Tavern62?

I'm most thankful for people who work so hard at the restaurant, and the loyal clientele in our Upper East Side neighborhood who have supported me since I opened Park Avenue Café in 1992.

Written by Robin Singer